



ISSU
IRISH SECOND-LEVEL
STUDENTS' UNION

NAMING THE REFORMED JUNIOR CYCLE

**Proposals for the
Minister for Education and Skills**



Foreword



'Students become architects of their own education'

We warmly welcome the invitation by the Minister for Education and Skills Ruairi Quinn for the ISSU to liaise with our members to suggest a name for the Qualification which will be associated with the reformed junior cycle of education in Ireland scheduled to commence in September 2014. It was a wonderful opportunity to engage with students, and proves young people are willing, excited and enthusiastic about making a greater connection with their learning.

The ISSU would like to take this opportunity to thank the Minister for engaging in this way with second-level students, allowing them to become the architects of their own education. As an organisation, we fundamentally believe that at all levels, students should be full partners in their education, and we hope that Minister Quinn will continue with this strong engagement throughout his tenure as Minister for Education and Skills.

The feedback we have received from our members has been fantastic, and we have shortlisted a number of names that reflects the new junior cycle course that are dynamic and refreshing. Young people are best placed to take the lead in redesigning the way in which students learn at junior cycle level, and involving young people in this process captures the fundamentals of the proposed reforms.

Niall Dennehy
Niall Dennehy
General Secretary

Leanne Caulfield
Leanne Caulfield
President

Outline

It was important to us to engage with as many students as possible throughout the process of developing a new name for the reformed junior cycle. In this vein, we used a wide variety of methods to engage with students in order to capture as many ideas as possible; text messaging, Facebook, Twitter, email and consultation sessions. We circulated posters to all schools via post and/or email, and contacted schools in catchment areas for the consultation sessions by phone.

In our consultation sessions, we had discussions with the participating students about what the new junior cycle would be, closely guided by the content of “Towards a Framework for Junior Cycle” from the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. In these sessions, students then gave feedback on what they thought of the reformed junior cycle, developed their own ideas, and identified what they thought should be reflected in the name of the reformed junior cycle.

There was a big response from students, particularly via text messaging through which we got a huge amount of name suggestions. We collated these names, and used them in our consultation sessions to allow us to get feedback from other students on what they thought of them. In these sessions, students also developed their own ideas, gave feedback on what they thought of the reformed junior cycle, and identified what they thought should be reflected in the title of the reformed junior cycle.

We collated all of this information into this document to reflect the opinions that students gave us on every aspect of the reformed junior cycle, and hope that all of this feedback can be used in planning the rollout of the new curriculum.



What the students said about the new Junior Cycle

Learning

- Students were very enthusiastic about the fact that learning would change dramatically from the heavy focus on rote-learning which exists with the current Junior Certificate and which they felt didn't prepare them for much beyond the State Examinations themselves. They thought that learning directed towards learning outcomes and key skills was a far better, more practical and useful approach than the existing junior cycle.
- They warmly welcomed the fact that ICT skills would be integrated across the curriculum and not just with related subjects, that they would learn more practical skills which would be of benefit to them in the long-term, that it would encourage creativity, and that it would prepare them more effectively for life after school.

Curriculum

- The overall reaction of students to the new curriculum was extremely positive, and there was no negative feedback from students about the new curriculum itself. The only area of some concern to them was that as it stands, the traditional Leaving Certificate consists of a very different style of learning, and that it too would need to be reformed so that students who go through the new junior cycle will not have to do the current senior cycle.
- They also were positive about the fact that what they would actually do in school would be more flexible, such as the availability of short courses, and that the traditional subject syllabi would be more flexible and allow them potentially to focus on areas of interest for project work etc.

Assessment

- Students were very positive about the fact that 40% of the marks in traditional subjects would be awarded for portfolio work. They felt that this would reduce the stress of the formal exams, and be more reflective of a student's overall effort and ability. This felt that this would be the case as currently students who don't perform well in exams are in a way discriminated against as the only assessments currently in place are the formal exams.

Qualifications

- Students were particularly enthusiastic the fact that the qualifications would be mapped onto the National Framework of Qualifications at both level 2 (for students with special educational needs) and level 3. They said that this would get students to take the exam more seriously, and that it would be useful for those who don't go on to finish the Leaving Certificate.

What the students said the new name should represent

Firstly, the vast majority of students felt that the new curriculum should definitely have a new name as it is vastly different to the Junior Certificate which is currently in place. There were a small number of students who felt that it did not necessarily need to have a new name, but didn't have any fundamental objections to a new name in principle.



Students felt that the new name should, to some degree, reflect how different the teaching and assessment methods are in the new curriculum. They also felt that it should reflect the key skills and learning outcomes contained in the curriculum.

In order to reflect the individual importance of the exam, most students expressed that it should be as directly linked to the name of the senior cycle exams as is currently the case, and it was important that it be an individual qualification which would be valuable in its own right whether or not the student goes on to complete senior cycle education and beyond.

Initial ideas for a new name

Naturally through our various collection methods, we were left with a very long list of potential names. Below is a summary of the most appropriate names suggested by students. After conducting our own research, we also developed some suggestions ourselves based on what state examinations are called in other countries.

- ABCs (assessment based course)
- AKS (Assessment of knowledge and skills)
- CFJS (course for junior students)
- ICA (Irish comprehensive/certificate assessment)
- ICE (Irish comprehensive exam)
- ICSE/ICSC (Irish core skills exam/certificate)
- IPASS (Irish proficiency assessment for second-level students)
- IPATS (Irish proficiency assessments for third-year students)
- IRC (innovation relevant course)
- JASA (Junior academic skills-assessment)
- JCCA (junior cycle continuous assessment)
- JCQA (junior cycle qualification assessment)
- JCQC (junior cycle qualification course)
- Junior inclusive education exam
- L2/L3 (Level 2 / level 3) assessment exams
- L3QA / LTQA (level 3 qualification assessment)
- L3QE (Level 3 qualification exam)
- Level 3 examinations
- MAOS (Mól an óige scrúdú)
- NJAs (National junior assessments)
- NJE (National junior exam)
- NQC (national qualification course)
- SCAE (State continuous assessment exams)
- SST (Scrúdaithe stáit teastas)
- STARS (School-based teacher-led assessment and reporting system)
- WECAC (written exam continuous assessment course)



Popular options for a new name:

At the end of each of our consultation sessions, we asked students to vote for their two or three favourite options from the ideas they had developed themselves, and a list we provided of suggestions from other sources. Obviously due to sample sizes this was only indicative, but the more popular options among students were:

- AKS (Assessment of knowledge and skills)
- ICA (Irish comprehensive/certificate assessment)
- ICE (Irish comprehensive exam)
- ICSE/ICSC (Irish core skills exam/certificate)
- IPASS (Irish proficiency assessment for second-level students)
- IPATS (Irish proficiency assessments for third-year students)
- IRA (Innovation relevant assessment)
- JASA (Junior academic skills-assessment)
- STARS (School-based teacher-led assessment and reporting system)

Naturally in some cases there were a number of slight variances (e.g. the AKS could be the Irish AKS or IAKS, in some cases the words exam and assessment could be interchanged, and so on).

Conclusion

Overall, the student response to the new junior cycle was overwhelmingly positive, and throughout our consultation process we didn't receive any negative feedback from students about it. We are of course aware that there have been a number of issues for concern from other stakeholders, and it is vital that all partners are kept on board to ensure that the vision for the future of junior cycle education in Ireland is implemented fully and effectively.

Our objective was to develop a new name for the new syllabus. This process has been student-led, and we thank the students who participated for their engagement and enthusiasm throughout the process. We have developed a list of popular options as decided by students for the new title. We hope that in conjunction with other partners, the most suitable of these is chosen, and also that students continue to play a key role in the development of the new junior cycle.

Finally, and most importantly the students who sent us their ideas and participated in our consultation sessions, their contributions were key to the process.

Quotes from the consultation sessions

“I think the whole thing is pretty good; it’ll be like a new exam for a new world, or a new education for a new world.”

“The forty percent of marks for portfolio work will take a lot of the stress off the final exams. I found them very pressured, and I think I wouldn’t have been as worried if I’d already done forty percent of the marks.”

If the new junior cycle is going to be really different from how the Leaving Certificate is done, then it should have a totally different name. I don’t think it’s just going to be a practice run for the Leaving.”

“I think the new name should reflect that it’s a different type of qualification - that there’s a focus on skills and what you can do. I think it will be a much more respected qualification at the end of it all.”

“I think it’s good that it’s a recognised level of qualification in Europe. I didn’t know that before but it’s good to know that it really has value in other countries too!”

“I think it will prepare students for life after the exams, instead of just for the exams which is what it is at the moment.”

